



Feb. 25, 2022

House Ways and Means Committee

HB 1089 – Election Law - Registered Voter List Security and Electronic Signature Requirements for Petitions

Position - Favorable

Dear Chair Atterbeary, Vice-Chair Washington and Members of the Committee:

During the pandemic, Maryland has been in the forefront of not just maintaining, but improving voter access to the ballot in innumerable ways, including expanding mail-in ballots – which can now be requested to be permanent by the voter, and no-touch drop boxes to ensure secure and timely receipt of ballots. The Brennan Center for Justice gave us a top score along with a handful of other states for these improvements. Independently, Maryland's State Board of Elections (SBE) approved the electronic collection of signatures to place questions on the ballot and for third party ballot access on a temporary basis. SBE approved the privately set-up signature platform, which included verifying the signer via the voter database and gathering I.P. addresses to preclude hacking. The program was used successfully.

Via HB 1089, the Maryland General Assembly should make the ability to collect electronic signatures to place questions on the ballot a permanent feature and require the SBE to develop the needed protocols. This is a voting rights issue for the average citizen and an absolute necessity for citizens with disabilities and those who do not have the luxury of free time and personal private transportation. Electronic signatures are now commonly used for many secure transactions and regulations to detect and avoid fraud are easily developed.

Requirement that there be physical contact between the voter and a person holding a clipboard is not just archaic but a serious impediment to the constitutional right guaranteed to Maryland citizens. Having utilized and found to be effective, Maryland should make electronic signatures for petitions permanent. While we raise our voices against voting rights shortcomings in other states, let's make sure that Maryland is leading by example.

We ask for a favorable vote.

Submitted respectfully,

Suchitra Balachandran
Chair, Our Revolution Prince George's